

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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SUBJ: ALCAN/EFE ARTICLE ON CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS

REF: PANAMA 2686

1. FOLLOWING IS INFORMAL EMBASSY TRANSLATION OF ACAN/EFE REPORT, DATELINE PANAMA MAY 5, WHICH APPEARED IN MAY 6 EDITION OF CRITICA. EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS STORY BASED ON INTERVIEW WITH FOREIGN MINISTER.

2. BEGIN TEXT: TO EXTENT THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND PANAMA OVER THE ZONE AND THE CANAL EXPERIENCE INCREASING DIFFICULTIES, LATIN AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE PANAMANIAN CAUSE IS REAFFIRMED.

FOREIGN MINISTER JUAN ANTONIO TACK ACKNOWLEDGED TODAY THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS WERE STALLED BECAUSE OF PRESSURES FROM THE PENTAGON AND THE NORTH AMERICAN CONGRESS BUT ANNOUNCED, ON THE OTHER HAND, THAT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES WILL ISSUE A RESOLUTION OF SUPPORT FOR THIS COUNTRY WHEN IT MEETS NEXT THURSDAY IN WASHINGTON.

IF THE SECOND REPORT CANNOT SURPRISE ANYONE, THE FIRST CAN CAUSE SURPRISE AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN

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FOLLOWING THE COURSE OF EVENTS.

CARRIED OUT WITH GREAT SECRECY BY BOTH PARTIES,
NO RESULTS OF THE NEGOTIATIONS HAVE BEEN MADE PUBLIC IN
PANAMA OR THE UNITED STATES SINCE THE END OF 1974.
LAST DECEMBER, GENERAL TORRIJOS ANNOUNCED THAT THE
SIGNATURE OF A NEW TREATY COULD TAKE PLACE DURING THIS
YEAR. LATER, IN THE MIDDLE OF FEBRUARY, IT WAS NORTH
AMERICAN SOURCES THAT FORETOLD THE IMMINENCE OF A TREATY.
HOWEVER, THE MERE ANNOUNCEMENT OF AN IMMINENT
AGREEMENT STIRRED THE CONTRADICTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES
BETWEEN THOSE IN FAVOR OF A PROMPT AGREEMENT, PERSONIFIED
BY THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, AND THOSE WHO DO NOT LOOK
WITH FAVOR ON THE ABROGATION OF THE PRESENT 1903 TREATY.
IT WAS GENERAL GEORGE BROWN, HEAD OF THE PENTAGON,
WHO OPENED FIRE ON POSSIBLE CONCESSIONS TO PANAMA.
FOLLOWING WERE 37 NORTH AMERICAN SENATORS WITH A RESOLUTION
OPPOSED TO ANY UNDERSTANDING.
WITH THAT NUMBER OF SENATORS OPPOSED, THE FIRST
UNPROMISING DIFFICULTY FOR THE RATIFICATION OF THE NEW
TREATY APPEARED. ONLY 33 SENATORS IN DISAGREEMENT ARE NEEDED IN
ORDER THAT THE DRAFT COULD NOT BE APPROVED BY CONGRESS.
THE PENTAGON AND CONGRES THUS APPEAR ALLIED,
ALTHOUGH FOR DIFFERENT REASONS, IN DEFENSE OF THE
SAME POSITION.
THERE STILL HAD NOT OCCURRRD THE LATEST INTER-
NATIONAL EVENTS THAT WITHOUT DOUBT DECIDED THE TURN
AGAINST THE NEW TREATY WITH PANAMA: THE FAILURE OF
KISSINGER'S MIDDLE EAST MISSION AND THE DEAFENING
FALL OF SOUTH VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA.
FOR THIS REASON, UNTIL A MONTH AGO PANAMA VIEWED
WITH OPTIMISM THE COURSE OF THE NEGOTIATIONS. A FEW
DAYS BEFORE THE PRESIDENTIAL MEETING IN PANAMA, WHEN
ON MARCH 23 THE PRESIDENTS OF VENEZUELA, COSTA RICA AND
COLOMBIA
MET WITH THE PANAMANIAN CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT,
GENERAL TORRIJOS ANNOUNCED THAT IN THREE YEARS THE ZONE
WOULD PASS TO PANAMANIAN JURISDICTION AND THAT "THE
TREATY IS LIKE A PUZZLE THAT COULD BE PUT TOGETHER IN
24 HOURS."

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THIS OPTIMISM, WITH THE SUPPORT OF LATIN AMERICA
OEVER YET CLEARER AFTER THE PRESIDENTS' MEETING, PREDOMINATED
UNTIL, IN THE LAST DAYS OF VIETNAM, THE HOUSE OF REPRE-
SENTATIVES ISSUED A NEW RESOLUTION SIGNED BY 113
CONGRESSMEN OPPOSED TO PANAMA'S ASPIRATIONS.
IT IS THE SAME HOUSE THAT CONVOKED A SPECIAL
SESSION TO STUDY THE SUBJECT. SPECIAL NEGOTIATOR
ELLSWORTH BUNKER, THE GOVERNOR OF THE CANAL ZONE,

AND OTHER PERSONALITIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE
CANAL WERE CALLED TO TESTIFY.

BUNKER ALSO ACKNOWLEDGED, BEFORE TACK, IN A LETTER TO
GOVERNOR OF THE ZONE HAROLD PARFITT, THAT THE
NEGOTIATIONS WERE PASSING THROUGH A DIFFICULT PERIOD.
THE NORTH AMERICAN NEGOTIATOR SAYS THAT THE PREMATURE
DISCLOSURES OF WHAT HAD BEEN ACHIEVED OR HAD NOT BEEN
ATTAINED HAD CONTRIBUTED TO THIS.

NEVERTHELESS, THE SAME DEPARTMENT OF STATE SIGNALLED
THE FIRST DIFFICULTIES, FROM THE MOUTH OF SECRETARY OF
STATE HENRY KISSINGER, WHEN STATING THAT THE NEW TREATY
WOULD GUARANTEE A NORTH AMERICAN PRESENCE FOR A LONG
PERIOD AND PROVIDE FOR AN ADEQUATE DEFENSE OF THE CANAL,
IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE INTERESTS OF THE UNITED STATES.
THESE APPEAR TO BE THE PRINCIPAL POINTS OF FRICTION
IN THE PRESENT STAGNATION (ESTANAEAMIENTO).

WITH THE NORTH AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE IN ASIA
CRUMBLING WITH THE FALL OF VIETNAM, THE CANAL BECOMES THE
POINT OF REFERENCE FOR A NEW NORTH AMERICAN MILITARY
STRATEGY IN THE REGION WHICH WILL HAVE JAPAN AND THE
PHILIPPINES AS PILLARS. END TEXT.

JORDEN

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